

THE
VALUE OF THE SOUL.

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A
SERMON.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SYNOD OF VIRGINIA,

AT STAUNTON, OCTOBER 19, 1809.

BY THE REV. CONRAD SPEECE, A. M.

“ Know’st thou th’ importance of a soul immortal ?
Behold this midnight glory : worlds on worlds !
Amazing pomp ! Redouble this amaze ;
Ten thousand add ; add twice ten thousand more ;
Then weigh the whole ; one soul outweighs them all ;
And calls th’ astonishing magnificence
Of unintelligent creation poor.”—YOUNG.

RICHMOND, PRINTED BY SAMUEL PLEASANTS, JUNIOR.

TO JOSIAH SMITH, ESQ. AND MRS. JUDITH M. SMITH.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

Permit me to record, on this humble page, my gratitude for the many kind attentions which I have received from you during a residence of several years in your house. Next to that happiness which you derive from religion, and to that which rewards your exemplary affection to each other, I scarcely know how to wish you any greater blessing than that you may always possess such friends as you have been to me. With fervent prayers for your welfare, in this world and in the world to come, I am,

My Dear Friends,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Powhatan County, Virginia, Jan. 10, 1810.

GEN. 1. 27.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.

THE sacred volume begins with a very interesting subject, the creation of the world. Concise as the account is, it conveys much information, and fills the mind with wonder and delight. God having brought matter into existence, proceeded to separate the parts of the chaotic mass, reduce them to order, and clothe them with beauty. By several successive steps the work advanced to perfection. He commanded, and light burst forth; the dry land arose from the midst of the waters, and covered itself with trees and herbage; the luminaries of Heaven assumed their appointed stations; and the waters, the air, the earth, all abounded with animal life in innumerable forms. To complete the goodly scene nothing more was requisite but an inhabitant capable of knowing and adoring the Creator. "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." This language is exceedingly remarkable. It evidently implies some mysterious plurality in the undivided Godhead. At the same time, every expression proclaims man a creature of extraordinary dignity. The image of God in which man was created did not consist in the structure of his body: for in this respect, though man is "fearfully and wonderfully made," he can bear no resemblance to God who is a spirit. Neither did that image consist in dominion over the other creatures: for this was no part of the constitution of man, but a grant from God to him after he was created. The divine image then must have consisted in the spiritual nature of the soul, its noble intellectual and active powers, and especially its dispositions for religion, and for that exalted happiness which flows from communion with God. It is in allusion to

this image of God in the soul, and to the loss of its best features by the fall, that the Apostle speaks of christians as being “renewed in the spirit of their minds,” and as “putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

It is my purpose, in conformity with the spirit of the text, to attempt an illustration of the value of the soul, and to deduce from the doctrine of its value some practical inferences and exhortations.

Who can approach this subject without trembling diffidence? It is so vast that every illustration of it must necessarily be very inadequate. Indeed none but he who made the soul can fully estimate its value. On the present occasion a few leading topics will be selected, and a little offered upon each. May God render the humble effort useful.

1. Let us, in the first place, contemplate the soul in its susceptibilities of happiness and misery.

The soul may enjoy or suffer much by means of the body. This every one knows by experience. The only question is, whether corporeal enjoyments and sufferings will have any place in a future state? Now we know by the word of God that the body shall be raised from the grave, that it shall then be re-united to the soul, and continue in union with it throughout the state of future retribution. It is even hence probable that the soul shall in some measure enjoy the rewards or suffer the punishments of the world to come through the instrumentality of the body. But farther, God teaches his children to wish ardently for the resurrection; to exult in the prospect of that day when they shall receive “the redemption of their bodies” from the prison of the grave; when “this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality;” when, to sum up all in a word, “this vile body shall be changed, that it may be fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body.” In the case of the wicked, our Saviour speaks of God as “able to destroy,” that is, to overwhelm with misery and ruin, “both soul and body in hell.” And though it is not here said expressly that he will punish sinners in this way, yet it seems clearly implied that he will; for otherwise we cannot suppose that the power to do it would

have been made, as it is, the ground of a solemn injunction to fear God. From these premises we may conclude, however great and unsearchable the change which the body is to undergo at the resurrection, and however figuratively we may expound some things written concerning Heaven and Hell, that the body shall be made subservient, in some way or other, to the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked hereafter. Our natural sentiments coincide with this information of scripture. It seems reasonable to expect that the body, which is so extensively instrumental here in works of obedience and of transgression, should be instrumental also in the retribution which is to follow. The particulars, however, of that instrumentality are at present veiled from us; perhaps because we are not yet capable of knowing them; perhaps because that knowledge might tend, whilst we inhabit flesh and blood, to draw our minds too much away from spiritual to corporeal objects. We shall understand this matter fully by experience. The faithful servant of God will learn in due time what is intended by a spiritual and glorified body, and what joys he is to derive from it. And the incorrigible sinner will know full soon what it is to be destroyed by the arm of the Almighty, both soul and body in hell.

But the soul is susceptible of enjoyments and sufferings much more interesting than those of the body. Is it necessary to prove this proposition? The wisest and best of mankind have always asserted, from their own consciousness, the superiority of mental over corporeal pleasures. And often has the despairing sinner declared, with irresistible energy, that the keenest agonies of the body are not to be compared with those of a guilty mind. The proposition is corroborated by another class of facts. Mental pleasures and consolations, especially those of religion, have enabled persons in every age to bear the utmost tortures of the body not only with patience but with triumph. And mental pains have often been so intense as to render all bodily gratifications insipid, and even loathsome. Let us investigate the principal sources of mental pleasure and pain.

The soul may be rendered happy or miserable in a high degree by the exercise of conscience. God has established in

the breast of man an awful tribunal, in which the soul is itself the subject of trial, the witness and the judge. Here is carried on a process inexpressibly important to our peace : for it is to decide whether we are entitled to our own approbation and esteem, or doomed to fall under our own reproaches and contempt. In the retreat of solitude, shrouded by the darkness of night, man sits in judgment upon himself. He compares his actions, his tempers, his desires, his most secret thoughts, with the standard of duty ; and pronounces that sentence of acquittal or condemnation which instantly executes itself by filling his bosom with gladness or anguish. They who enjoy the deliberate approbation of their own minds deem it a treasure of inestimable price. “ Our rejoicing is this,” says the Apostle, “ the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world.” And in proportion as this inward testimony of rectitude is precious to the good man, remorse is dreadful to the wicked. Like a thorn in his pillow, it deprives him of rest, in defiance of riches, friends and health. It sometimes renders life itself an intolerable burden, and prompts the wretch to cast it violently away. In this world, however, we taste but a small part of the happiness or misery which may be derived from conscience. The people of God see in themselves many remains of sin, which interrupt their peace, and frequently obscure to a great degree the evidences of their gracious state. Those who have made the highest advances in sanctification discern most clearly and lament most deeply the imperfection which mingles with their best actions. On the other hand, the wicked have now many successful contrivances to escape the pangs of an accusing conscience, or to diminish their severity. Conscience may be kept in a state of debility by ignorance. It may be perverted by sophistry. It may be silenced by the tumults of business, or lulled to sleep by the enchantments of pleasure. It may be rendered utterly insensible, “ seared as with a hot iron,” by long indulged and inveterate habits of iniquity. Indeed the most completely wicked of mankind generally suffer at present the smallest share of

this secret anguish. But let us consider the probable, or rather the certain agency of conscience in another world. There "the spirits of the just are made perfect." They have no more occasion to accuse themselves, to confess and bewail the defects of their conduct. In the unclouded light of Heaven they contemplate the law of God, the standard of all rectitude, and conscience every moment pronounces their exact conformity with it in temper, thought and action. Conceive, if it be possible, what must be the delight of the glorified soul in beholding its own spotless purity; conscious that it partakes of a divine nature, that it bears the moral image of God without one distorted lineament. And now let us turn our view to the case of the lost sinner, abandoned to his own consummate depravity. His reason, no longer deluded by the sophistry of the passions, acts with a vigour unknown before. The law of God, refulgent in holiness, stands perpetually before him, at once extorting his acknowledgement of its justice, and inflaming his implacable enmity against it. Memory compels his attention to the long, blasting catalogue of his transgressions. He cannot now, as formerly, banish them from his thoughts, nor disguise their enormity by plausible excuses. Conscience awakes from her lethargy, to slumber no more. With uncontrollable energy she executes her work of vengeance; pointing as with the sting of a scorpion, to torture the sinner's heart, every faculty of his nature which he has debased, every blessing of Providence which he has abused, every warning of danger which he has contemned, every call and exhortation of mercy which he has trampled under foot, every moment of time which he has irretrievably wasted. If he reflects upon the past, all is guilt. If he looks inwards, all is conscious disorder and degradation, the finished reverse of true excellence and glory. And what is his prospect for the future? The horrible certainty that not one good thought, not one holy emotion, shall ever spring up within his breast. How dismal the gloom of a rational soul feeling itself sunk into total wickedness, without one glimmering hope of a change? Some persuade themselves that there will be no Hell hereafter besides remorse or conscience. Were this opinion true, it

would surely behoove the sinner to tremble and fly from the danger. Remorse may prove a hell beyond imagination terrible. But the opinion that the wicked are to suffer no other punishment is far from being true.

The soul may, and indeed must derive much happiness or misery from its social principles. It is the nature of man to seek society. And in society he covets not merely an exchange of occasional good offices, but a permanent reciprocation of esteem and benevolence. In the very exercise of these affections towards those with whom he holds intercourse he finds great pleasure: and to inspire them with the same affections towards himself, what sacrifice will he not make, what labours will he not undergo? The heart shudders instinctively at the idea of living without objects suited to draw forth its love and confidence. Still less tolerable is the thought of being the object of universal contempt, or even indifference.-- In such circumstances no earthly possession could afford tranquility. These observations find a ready testimony to their truth in every human breast. Social principles actuate all mankind, but in different ways, and with different consequences. The servant of God makes holiness an essential ingredient of his friendships, those tender connections which constitute the balm of life. This tends the most decisively to secure their continuance and happiest effects. At the same time he feels and cultivates within himself an enlarged benevolence towards all men, especially towards them who are "of the household of faith." Regulating his conduct by the laws of universal righteousness, he deserves the cordial esteem of all, and is sure to obtain that of the wise and good in proportion as they know his character. The people of God he accounts "the excellent of the earth," whom he "loves with a pure heart fervently," and "in whom is all his delight." In mingling his religious sentiments, satisfactions and hopes with theirs, he tastes a felicity more precious than any that a worldly friendship can bestow. It is true that in the present state only a few of the great body of christians can be acquainted with each other. They observe in each other many imperfections. And what is most to be lamented, they are liable to be alienated from each other in no small degree by sus-

picious and jealousies, the bitter fruits of their division in opinion and denomination. Yet with all these abatements, the communion of the saints has ever been deemed by them a source of exquisite pleasure. And doubtless it will be much more so when carried to perfection in a better world. "Ye are come," says the Apostle, in a style of rapturous anticipation, "to the general assembly and church of the first born who are written in Heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect." Glorious and blessed society! There shall all the children of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, meet together, and know each other completely. Prejudice and bigotry, which do so much mischief here, shall no more impair the mutual esteem and love of christian brethren. The image of God shall shine in every face, and be contemplated by all with complacency too strong to be uttered. In that holy community every individual shall exult in the happiness of the whole. And in the harmony of universal joy, gratitude and praise there shall not be one jarring string, not one discordant note. — There, moreover, shall "the redeemed from amongst men" enter into fellowship with "an innumerable company of angels," those benevolent spirits who now "minister to the heirs of salvation." And we cannot doubt that the accession of the angels to the society of glorified saints shall exceedingly improve the happiness of both. Christians derive much joy, in this land of their pilgrimage, from the hope of that exalted communion. Yet their best conceptions of it must necessarily sink far below the reality. The soul can only learn by experience the fulness of bliss which may spring from its social constitution, refined to the utmost by religion, and transplanted into the heavenly world. As to the irreligious, they also have their friendships. For as they are not yet given up to utter depravity, they possess some qualities which resemble true virtue, such as natural affection, humanity, and the desire to please; which, however, it is the sure tendency of sin to eradicate from the soul. By means of these qualities they form connections of tenderness and esteem. And such is the corrupt taste of the world that they often esteem each other for the most frivolous endowments, and even

for dispositions and conduct which God and reason condemn. But attachments founded on such principles are precarious in their duration, and comparatively very grovelling in their nature. They speedily pass away forever. And in the mean time, the wicked cannot entirely conceal from themselves that they are beheld by the people of God with mingled indignation and pity. At the last day "they shall arise from the dust of the earth unto shame and contempt." Saints and angels will then feel no other affection towards them but perfect abhorrence; and their own consciousness will pronounce that abhorrence just. There shall indeed be society in Hell, but of a kind too dreadful to conceive; a society of the seducers and the seduced; a society without love or respect, without the least sympathy to alleviate suffering; a society of mutual tormentors, heaping upon each other bitter and incessant reproaches; a society, in short, of which every member will feel and express towards himself and all the rest a sovereign and inextinguishable scorn. Full well may the christian pray, "gather not my soul with sinners," O Lord, but with thy children, even with the righteous in whom is all my delight.

If the soul is susceptible of so much happiness or misery by the means already mentioned, what shall we say of its direct intercourse with the eternal God? An intercourse of friendship or enmity with God! The mind is overwhelmed by the thought. It is scarcely possible to handle this subject without doing it injury; only a few words, therefore, shall be offered upon it. Of the nature of a communion of love between God and the soul, and of the pleasures which arise from it, very clear ideas can only be obtained by experience. Let the pious man consult his own consciousness. Let him consider the delight with which he sees and studies the various works of God in the natural world, tracing in them his infinite wisdom, power and goodness: the still greater delight which is often enkindled in his bosom by the written word of God, in which his attributes are more illustriously displayed than in all the beauties which adorn the earth, or all the stars which spangle the heavens. Let him recollect some precious hour when the holy spirit drew him peculiarly near to God, when he was indulged with views more distant and

extensive than ordinary of the divine character. Let him recall those feelings with which he contemplated the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary; those impressions with which he beheld "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Let him select that moment of "joy unspeakable and full of glory," when, borne on pinions of love, he soared above the world, and cried with strong confidence of faith, "my Lord and my God;" this God is my father, my friend, my portion, and will be mine whilst I have a being. And then let him be assured that all this is but the faint dawn of that communion with the Father and the Son which is reserved for every christian in the world to come. "With the wicked God is angry every day." But they labor, and generally with fatal success, to exclude the idea from their mind. Nothing but the forbearance of God prevents the immediate effusion of his wrath upon the heads of his enemies, which would crush them in a moment to utter perdition. The enmity of their hearts against him, his gospel, his laws, and his people, is augmenting every hour. They are ripening fast for destruction; and the insulted patience of God hastens to a close. Yet all the while they are thoughtless of danger. They walk unappalled "in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes;" deluding themselves with vain hopes, and dreaming of peace and safety even on the brink of hell. What horrors must seize the soul of the impenitent sinner, if not on a dying bed, yet certainly when he awakes in another world to a full sense of the wrath of God; when, cut off from all his former pleasures, deprived of his subterfuges, and destitute of all resource, he beholds his Creator arrayed in arms for the punishment of his crimes, and feels "the arrows of the Almighty drinking up his spirit!" To be exiled from the favorable presence of God; to sink under his curse into "the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels;" above all, to find in a rejected Saviour an inexorable and irresistible avenger; this is misery too stupendous for the imagination of mortal man to conceive. It is nevertheless the certain doom of all who leave this world without being prepared by true religion for the kingdom of heaven.

II. It is time that we proceed, in the second place, to contemplate the soul in the duration of its existence. Now the

soul is an immortal substance. Death dissolves the body, but the soul survives: yea it shall continue to exist forever. This conscious being, which so lately began its career, is no less than the heir of eternity. Eternity! What incomprehensible importance does this attribute confer upon the soul. What emotions of hope and of fear does it awaken within us, unless our hearts are dead to every serious thought. Our instinctive thirst after an endless existence is so strong that we should deem man nothing more than a splendid, wretched trifle, with all his boasted capacities, did we believe him destined, at some future period, however distant, to lose them and himself forever. But when we consider him clothed with immortality, soon to be fixed in a state of interminable joy or woe, every thing which can influence his condition in that state expands and rises in magnitude beyond our utmost powers of estimation.

Let the christian study the word of God and his own nature. By these means let him form the best possible apprehensions of that exalted felicity which is laid up in store for him, and for the enjoyment of which he is every day becoming more and more qualified. Let him look forwards to an entire exemption from all kinds of pain and sorrow, to the pleasures which he may derive from a glorified body, from the constant and perfect approbation of his own conscience, from the society of saints and angels, from the immediate presence of his Redeemer, from the smiles of the only true and only wise God. And at each step of this delightful process let him pause, and add to every article the idea of eternity, the assurance that his happiness shall be firm and durable as the very throne of God. It is eternity that renders heaven a heaven indeed. Most justly may the children of God adopt the language of the enraptured Apostle, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen,* for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

As the happiness of the righteous will be eternal, so also will be the misery of the wicked. "They shall go away," the judge himself has informed us, "into everlasting punish-

**but at the things which are not seen:*

ment." Whatever anguish the condemned soul is to endure from the loss of all good, whatever agonies from the body, from remorse of conscience, from the society of devils and of impious men made by themselves infernal, from the intolerable wrath of Almighty God inflicted without any mixture of mercy, all shall be without intermission and without end. Fearful doom ! Could one ray of hope penetrate the dark regions of Hell, were it only the hope of annihilation after ten thousand ages spent in torments, it would be received by the inhabitants with joy, as changing their dungeon into a paradise. But even this hope is denied them. In whatever direction they turn their eyes, they meet with nothing but absolute despair. They know that "their worm is never to die," that "their fire is never to be quenched," that the time of their release from suffering shall never, never arrive.

It has been thought that the soul will be forever advancing in knowledge, in the strength and range of its affections, whether good or evil, and consequently in happiness or misery. The word of God contains nothing inconsistent with this opinion ; and there are reasons which give it a considerable degree of probability. From what we know of the soul, it evidently seems formed for a progress in the exercise of its faculties to which we can fix no limits. Is it credible that this progress shall be closed with the present life, the mere infancy of our existence ? The world to come will afford us opportunities for intellectual improvement far exceeding those with which we are yet acquainted. Shall we not learn perpetually more and more of God, his works, his providence, his laws, and the great scheme of redemption through his Son ? And will not our extended knowledge, combining then as it does now with our moral dispositions, produce a corresponding increase of our pleasures or our pains ? Of the people of God it is said that, even in this land of shadows, "they all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." Is it not hard to conceive that when they have ascended from this world to Heaven they shall advance from glory to glory no more ? Surely it is much more reasonable to infer that the process shall go on,

and with a rapidity transcending all their former experience. If then this opinion of the progress of the soul be well founded, how amazing, how transporting is the destiny of the redeemed, rising incessantly in perfection and felicity; approaching at every moment of an eternal existence nearer and nearer to the all glorious and ever blessed God: though between him and the most exalted of his creatures an infinite distance must still forever remain. How dreadful, beyond all conception, is the doom of the wicked, if, after being driven into Hell under the curse of God, they are to sink continually lower and lower, through boundless ages, in wickedness and in misery.—Should this opinion, however, prove erroneous, let it be remembered as an infallible truth, that eternal happiness or eternal misery, each far too intense for our present comprehension, is to be the portion of every human soul in the world to come.

III. Let us contemplate the soul, in the third and last place, as the subject of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. No other view of the soul exhibits its value so impressively as this; especially to those who are accustomed to think and to feel in conformity with evangelical principles. It is not intended here to undertake an exposition of the precise nature of redemption, nor to make a formal defence of the doctrine against the assaults of its adversaries. For our present purpose it is sufficient to observe in general, according to the scriptures, that “the soul is bought with a price;” that this price “does not consist of corruptible things, as silver and gold, but of the precious blood of Christ; who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; upon whom was the chastisement of our peace, and with whose stripes we are healed:” in a word, that the sufferings of Christ are the meritorious and indispensable consideration for which God bestows upon us perishing sinners pardon, sanctification and eternal life. Think upon the character of our Redeemer. He is “the Lord from Heaven, God manifest in the flesh;” God and man mysteriously united in one person. As God, he could not suffer: but having assumed our nature for that purpose the divinity enabled the man Christ Jesus to bear agonies which no mere creature could have supported, and gave

infinite worth and efficacy to his atonement. Hence the apostle, speaking of the church, does not scruple to call it "the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Think of the extent of our Redeemer's sufferings. The least part was that which the cruelty of men inflicted. Upon the supposition that this part was indeed the whole, as some, who yet presume to style themselves Christians, assert, we must acknowledge that Jesus Christ behaved with far less magnanimity and fortitude than have appeared in many of his disciples, and even in men who were strangers to religious consolation. But nothing can be supposed more contrary to the whole tenor of scripture. No; it was the divine wrath due to our sins, the inconceivable weight of anguish which the son of God bore in our stead, that constrained him to cry in the garden, "O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and on the cross, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" At the foot of the cross, then, let us take our place; and whilst we hear our Immanuel's groans, whilst we behold him bleeding and dying, let us learn to estimate the value of the soul by the price of its reconciliation to God.— Surely the God of all wisdom would not give his only begotten Son, nor would the Son give himself a ransom, but for an object of very distinguished importance. Wondrous cross of Christ! Nothing else in Heaven or earth displays with such lustre the glory of God. Nothing else so deeply humbles, nor so highly exalts the soul of man.

It will perhaps be said, by way of objection to this last illustration of our subject, that the ultimate purpose of God in the scheme of redemption is not the salvation of man, but the manifestation of his own glory. It is true that God makes his own glory the end of all that he does; and it is a truth of the sublimest order. But as this truth does not imply that we are the less obliged to be thankful for redemption, since "God is love," and glorifies himself by the very exercise of his love to lost sinners; so neither does it imply that the value of the soul is set aside, nor even that it is diminished in any degree whatever. Rather it sets before us the value of the soul in its best and noblest point of light; namely, as it is an instrument in the hands of God by which he will discover to

an admiring universe the riches of his wisdom, power, holiness and mercy. In proportion as we advance towards perfection in religion, we are pleased with this view of God and of ourselves: it becomes more and more our joy to believe that "he hath made all things for himself;" that we are saved from sin and Hell "to the praise of the glory of his grace;" and that "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is known by the church," and by every individual member of it, "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he hath purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In every particular of our investigation we have soon found ourselves lost in a field much too vast for our weak sight fully to explore. But we have seen what will be greatly beneficial to us, and to others also, provided we make the proper improvement of it.

1. My first inference is, that the salvation of the soul is our chief concern, and ought to be made by every one of us the chief business of life. Are we indeed immortal? Do we stand just on the verge of heaven or hell? Is it utterly uncertain how soon we may be called away? And does it depend upon our conduct here whether we are to be happy or miserable forever? Not one word more can be necessary to justify my inference. Suffer me to exhort you, with all earnestness, that you put it in practice.

Art thou, my hearer, until this hour a stranger to God? Dost thou live in sin, "according to the course of this world," regardless of that sword of vengeance which the Almighty suspends over thy head; despising, or at least neglecting the way of salvation set before thee in the gospel? Awake from this perilous indifference; shake off this infatuation which leads thee to ruin; and reflect, whilst reflection may yet be useful to thee, upon the value of thy soul. It is no slight interest, but eternal happiness, that thou art selling for the trifles of an hour. And by the same means that thou lovest Heaven, thou art as certainly laying up for thyself eternal misery in Hell. Be persuaded, then, to fly for the life of thy soul. Dost thou ask whither? There is but one way; namely, "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,"

including a life of universal holiness. Dost thou plead thy inability to comply with these terms? Rather confess and lament it deeply before God; for it consists of nothing but the depravity of thy nature, the opposition of thy heart to that which is good. Implore the Father of Mercies to remove this dreadful obstruction. It is his to give repentance and faith as well as remission of sins. "He waits to be gracious," and is "able to save to the uttermost." Go, then, and strive to give thyself up to God as a sincere penitent; embracing the overture of his free salvation through Jesus Christ, and resolving to walk henceforth in the path of heavenly wisdom and righteousness. And in the very attempt thus to enter into covenant with God, acknowledge thy insufficiency for it, and cast thyself upon the all sufficient grace of his Holy Spirit. Upon these evangelical principles, "seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

Art thou a procrastinator in religion; convinced that a change of heart and life is necessary, but unwilling to engage in it now, and therefore putting it off to "a more convenient season?" It is highly probable that thou wilt never find such a season, nor even one so convenient as the present. Continuance in sin tends to harden the heart, not to dispose it for the service of God. Death may overtake thee in the midst of thy dreams of future reformation. Or God may speedily withdraw the influences of his spirit, and abandon thee utterly to thy impenitence. We know that the grace of God is almighty to save: but we see in fact that few are saved who spend the prime of their years in rebellion against him. Consider also that the purpose of turning to God not now but at some future time, carries absurdity upon the very face of it. How is it possible that he who loves sin too well to relinquish it immediately can sincerely intend to abhor and renounce it hereafter? These dilatory, these fictitious resolutions are an abomination in the sight of God. He requires our instant return, with the most cheering promises of mercy to them who obey the call, but denounces anguish and hopeless desolation against those who trifle with his reproofs. In such circumstances as these wilt thou still insult the patience of God, and sport with the welfare of thy immortal soul? "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Hear the voice of God, and make thy peace with him to-day. Before to-morrow the door of reconciliation may be shut against thee forever.

Art thou, my hearer, balancing in thy mind between religion and the world? Melancholy situation! Thou knowest it to be "an evil and bitter thing that thou hast departed from God." Thou seest that without his favour thou canst never be truly happy. The reproaches of thy conscience, the fears of eternal misery, mar all thy worldly pleasures, and fill thy bosom with disquiet. Yet in spite of these convictions and feelings, some sin or other holds thee fast with the grasp of a fiend, and refuses to let thee go. Some criminal passion, some inveterate habit of vice, shuts the entrance of thy heart against God and his salvation. Thy case affords a frightful illustration of the slavery of sin. Cry unto God to deliver thee from it; for it is a work which omnipotence alone can perform. May his grace dissolve the enchantment which makes thee prefer a moment to eternity; and incline thee to decide, at once and effectually, the great question concerning thy soul as thou knowest it ought to be decided.

Art thou a Christian? Improve the view which we have taken of the value of the soul to thy establishment in religion. Let it confirm to thee the wisdom of thy choice, sustain thee under all thy trials, and excite thee to livelier activity in the duties of thy high and holy vocation. This world is not thy treasure nor thy home. Let not its little affairs engage too much of thy attention. Beyond the simple accommodations necessary for a traveller to Heaven, seek earthly possessions only as the means of gloryfying God and doing good to thy fellow creatures. Be not cast down by the afflictions which, for wise and gracious purposes, thy Heavenly Father lays upon thee. For they shall soon come to an end; thou shalt enter into rest, and sorrow and pain shall overtake thee no more forever. Neither let thy heart envy the prosperity of the wicked. For though thou mayest be poor and low in the world, thy portion is infinitely preferable to theirs. Surely thou wouldst not exchange the approbation of thy conscience, the hope of immortal glory, nor even one hour of intimate communion with God, for all the fleeting wealth and grandeur of the sinner. Let it be thy great concern to "work out thy salvation with fear and trembling, looking unto God to work in thee both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Let every action of thy life be such as becomes a disciple of Christ,

redeemed by his blood, and regenerated by his Spirit "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away." And whilst many "profess to know God, who in their works deny him;" whilst some of his own people diminish the brightness of their future crowns, as well as injure their present usefulness and comfort, by the weakness of their zeal in religion, and their excessive attachment to worldly objects; be thou "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as thou knowest that they labour is not in vain in the Lord."

2. My second inference is, that we are bound to use our utmost exertions to promote the salvation of others. Are we called to do good by the sympathetic constitution of our nature, by the example of Jesus Christ, by the authority of God? And does every human soul possess a value above our comprehension? If so, to aim at the salvation of souls by all possible means is evidently the most obligatory of our social duties. To this glorious work, the sublime of benevolence, allow me to urge every one of my hearers.

Do you inquire what are the practicable means for extending the power of religion amongst mankind? All cannot at present be enumerated. It will be a pleasing task, however, to point out to you those which are of primary importance.

The first to be mentioned, because the most efficacious, is prayer. God has taught us to pray "that he will send forth labourers into his harvest; that his word may have free course and be glorified; that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done upon earth as it is in heaven." Is this the solitary instance in which he has commanded us to seek his face in vain? Far from us be the thought. No such instance exists. "This is the confidence which we have in our God, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." He not only bestows upon his children individually the blessings which they ask for themselves; but in wonderful condescension, he has connected with their prayers the prosperity of his church, the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world. It is in answer to their request that he grants those effusions of his Holy Spirit which alone are available to the establishment of saints or the conversion of sinners, and which with infinite ease bear down all opposition before them. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to specify any great revival of religion which was not manifestly the fruit of an unusual earnestness of prayer directed to that

very object. And when we perceive this spirit kindling in any part of the church, do we not assure ourselves that "days of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" are at hand, that the kingdom of the Devil is about to suffer loss, and the cause of our Redeemer to flourish? Were the great body of Christians heartily determined to obtain for themselves and others every good gift which could possibly be obtained from Heaven by importunate and persevering prayer, who dares to limit, or who can fully conceive the consequences which would ensue? In this way, we can hardly doubt, is to be introduced that transcendent glory which is reserved for the church in the last days. And in the mean while we know that not one fervent supplication is addressed to the throne of grace without effect. So mighty an instrument is prayer for the salvation of souls. It is an instrument too which all may employ, the poor as well as the rich, the unlettered as well as the learned, the weak as well as the powerful: for it consists of nothing else but the sincere desires of the heart offered up to God. And how far the secret, artless prayers of the least of Christ's disciples may subserve the great purposes for which he came into the world, no mortal man can tell. Do you, then profess, to love your brethren of the human family? Do you feel, as you ought, a deep concern for the welfare, present and eternal, of your immediate neighbours, and of the millions who are perishing by sin in this and other countries? Go and cry without ceasing unto God in their behalf. Implore of him that he will pity the souls which he has made; that he will "send out his light and his truth" abundantly; that he will attend with the all-subduing energy of his spirit the efforts made by his ministers and people for the extension of his kingdom; and that he will speedily "give to his son Jesus Christ the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession."

With our prayers for the salvation of others we are required to join the influence of christian example. It is true that mankind are deplorably corrupted by the fall; that they corrupt each other still more by evil communication; and that they do not naturally imitate the patterns of holiness which are presented to their view. But God has established it as a rule in the dispensation of his grace to make the good lives of his children instrumental in turning sinners to righteousness. A steady example of piety and virtue excites attention, proves the sincerity and enforces the admonitions of the religious pro-

fessor, exhibits the power and excellence of christianity, and by the grace of God often becomes effectual in bringing the most hardened of rebels to repentance. We see every day what mischief is done to the kingdom of Jesus Christ by the lukewarmness of some, the worldliness and even gross immoralities of others, who call themselves by his name. Were all professing Christians actuated by the genuine spirit of the gospel; did they zealously "show forth the praises of him who has called them," as they assert, "out of darkness into his marvellous light," by lives of true devotion to God and benevolence to men, free alike from ostentation and timidity; this would itself be a glorious reformation; and we cannot doubt that it would tend very powerfully to reclaim multitudes who are now destroying themselves by sin, despising the offered mercy of God, by which alone they can be saved. It ought to be remembered also that christian example, as well as prayer, is an instrument which all may use to advantage. If there are any exceptions, they are so extremely few as not to deserve notice here. There is scarcely a human being so weak, so obscure, as to be altogether without influence over others. And those who seem to approach the nearest to this description, who have little or no ability for active service in the cause of God, may nevertheless strongly recommend religion by bearing with patience the afflictive dispensations of his providence. If, then, you wish to promote the salvation of your fellow creatures, let it be seen that you are earnestly engaged in securing your own. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." Blessed days of primitive Christianity, revisit us once more; that the world may again be constrained to say, behold how fervently the Christians love, behold with what uprightness and purity the Christians live.

It appears that none of us is exempted from the duty, none is debarred from the privilege, of being instrumental in the salvation of immortal souls. Here are means by which we may all subserve the great work of divine mercy. There are others, however, to be used by particular classes of mankind, according to the stations which they occupy, and the talents with which they are invested. Let us select a few instances.

Art thou a parent? Let the eternal welfare of thy offspring be an object precious to thy heart, far more precious than all the earthly possessions and accomplishments which thou canst

confer upon them. God has implanted in thy breast the inexpressible tenderness of parental love : let its operations be directed by the principles of wisdom. He has given thee authority over thy children : exert that authority, to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” By evangelical instruction, by wholesome restraint and correction, as well as by thy prayers and example, labour diligently to preserve them from the seductions of vice and infidelity, and to lead them in the path of holiness. Remember at all times thy responsibility to God in regard to thy children ; and let nothing be wanting on thy part to qualify them for his service in this world, and for that happiness which he will bestow upon his people in the world to come. Think, parents, what must be your anguish at the day of judgment, if your children rise up and charge you with the perdition of their souls ! Think how rich will be your joy, if you hear them at that day ascribing their salvation, under God, to your faithful and unwearied exertions.

Art thou a master or a mistress ? Be sensible of thy obligation to treat thy servants in some measure as thou shouldst treat thy children, considering that they are committed by the providence of God to thy peculiar care. Gain their affection, if possible, by a just and benevolent carriage towards them ; and let them see that thou takest a lively interest in their happiness, both present and future. Facilitate their access to the means of grace. Endeavour to make the Sabbath a day of rest to their bodies, and of holy joy to their souls. Be their model, their guide, and their encourager in the duties of religion. Like Abraham of old, “command thy household after thee,” and indulge the hope that through thy instrumentality they shall be induced “to keep the way of the Lord” to their everlasting salvation.

Art thou a magistrate ? Has thy country clothed thee with the power of her laws, and intrusted thee with the preservation of her morals ? Administer justice in the fear of God. — Consider thyself as “his messenger for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.” Be thou always the steady friend of religion ; the vigilant observer, the inflexible suppressor of profaneness, fraud and sensuality.

Art thou a minister of the gospel ? How glorious, how awful is thy office ! To thee, ambassador of Christ, to thee especially of all men has God assigned the work of saving im-

mortal souls. "Take heed, therefore, unto thyself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made thee an overseer, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Remembering that God will require at thy hand the souls to whom he sends thee, let thy time and thy faculties be devoted perpetually to the business of training his people for Heaven, and "plucking the wicked as brands out of the fire." Did the Son of God die for the redemption of souls? Are immortal souls in danger of sinking every moment before thine eyes into hell? Let the mournful scene arouse thy benevolent feelings, and call forth all thy powers into the most vigorous exercise. "I charge thee," says the Apostle, "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." Cultivate within thyself a deep and abiding impression of the value of the soul; and "count not" thy ease, thy pleasures, nor even "thy life dear to thyself, so that thou mayest finish thy course with joy, and the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Has God endowed thee, my hearer, with genius and learning above the ordinary level of mankind? Whatever is thy station in life, consecrate these gifts to the advancement of his glory and the best interests of thy neighbour. Be not ashamed of the cross of Christ. Instead of seeking the applause of the impious, let the force of thy understanding, the stores of thy literature, the edge of thy well managed wit, be directed to the support of pure and undefiled religion against its numerous adversaries. Let the sophistries of vice be dissolved by thy touch, and the brazen front of infidelity tremble in thy presence.

Hast thou a happy talent for conversation? Canst thou gracefully lead the discourse of thy company according to thy will; canst thou fix their attention, and impress thy thoughts with energy upon their minds? This faculty is as important as it is rare. Employ it diligently in behalf of God and his laws. Repress that levity, that licentiousness of speech, by which so much mischief is done in the world. Watch for the favorable moment, seize it when it arrives, to awaken the reason and conscience, to enlist the feelings of those who hear thee, on the side of religious truth and duty. "Let thy speech

be always with grace, seasoned with salt; that thou mayest know how to address and to answer every man" in such a manner as will tend, through the divine blessing, to his everlasting advantage.

Art thou rich in this world? It is enjoined upon thee "that thou be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: that thou do good, that thou be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for thyself a good foundation against the time to come, that though mayest lay hold on eternal life." Consider thyself as a steward of the gifts of God, and be careful so to dispense them as to meet his approbation. Compassionate the poor, and open thy hand bountifully to relieve their necessities.—Especially bestow a portion, a liberal portion, of thy substance for the propagation of the gospel. Contemplate the thousands, the millions of souls in thy own country and in heathen lands who are perishing in sin and ignorance. Can thy superfluous money be made an instrument for sending to them the message of salvation? Art thou invited to an agency in destroying the empire of darkness, guilt and misery, and filling Heaven with glorified inhabitants, by "the mammon of unrighteousness? And wilt thou keep it back, to lie hoarded for no purpose in thy coffers, or to be dissipated in the pernicious luxuries of the world? Surely it cannot be. No; we hope better things of thee, though we thus speak. We trust that thy heart rejoices in the opportunity of serving God, and of conferring eternal benefits upon thy fellow creatures, by means of those possessions which, however they may be used, must soon vanish away forever.

This discourse must now be concluded. Ye see, brethren, the duties which are enjoined upon you. "If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them." May the God of mercy dispose us all so to obey his commandments here below, that we may in due time receive from his lips that cheering sentence, well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."---AMEN.